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December Precipitation Over the Great Lakes

As a percentage of the long-term December average:

Great Lakes Basin	134%
Lake Erie (including Lake St. Clair)	118%
Lake Superior	111%
Lakes Michigan-Huron	151%
Lake Ontario	132%

Note: These figures are preliminary.

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Volume 5, Number 1 **January 6, 1997**

Water Levels Ended 1996 Well Above Average

Water levels on the Great Lakes, which started 1996 at average, have risen to well above average by the end of the year, posing a serious risk of flood damage for the coming spring.

December was another wet month with above average precipitation on the Great Lakes basin. The total amount for 1996, estimated at 934 mm, was 14% above average, and the highest of the past six years. All the lakes had above average precipitation on their basins in 1996.

During December, very little change in levels occurred on the upper lakes, while Lake St. Clair, Lake Ontario and particularly Lake Erie rose. Lake Superior started 1997 22 cm above average, while Lakes Michigan-Huron, St. Clair and Erie were 42 to 55 cm above average. Lake Ontario was 23 cm above average.

Fortunately, damage to shore property was minimal during the month, due to an absence of severe wind storms. However, mild conditions delayed formation of ice along shorelines, leaving the shores exposed to wave action into January.

High St. Lawrence River Flows

At the end of December, ice had not yet formed in the St. Lawrence River, due to a rather mild month. As a result, the International St. Lawrence River Board of Control was able to direct Lake Ontario outflows well above the amounts specified by the regulation plan. By early January, the over-discharges were equivalent to a 20 cm lowering effect on Lake Ontario. The Board will maintain outflows as high as possible in order to reduce the risk of flooding on Lake Ontario this spring.

An absence of ice in the St. Lawrence River also enabled a smooth closing on December 26 of the navigation season between Lake Ontario and Montreal. In contrast, ice arrived early in December 1995, which posed severe difficulties to navigation and necessitated Lake Ontario outflow reductions.

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